

2014 Human Rights Report - Preface

The fundamental struggle for dignity has been a driving force in human history worldwide, and what drives us toward it is a set of universal values and aspirations.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are ideals that cannot be contained by national boundaries or ocean shores.

That is why it is especially troubling that so many people in so many places face grotesque restrictions on their freedoms and rights from their own governments.

For far too many people, 2014 was defined by suffering and abuse perpetrated by terrorist groups exploiting religious discourse and divisions to advance their totalitarian ideology, or by governments, such as **Syria**, sometimes acting in the name of combatting terrorism.

In parts of the Middle East and Africa, violent extremists have made it clear that not only do they have zero regard for human rights; they have zero regard for human life, period. We've seen groups like ISIL burn human beings alive, barbarically behead prisoners, sell girls into slavery, and execute innocents widely and indiscriminately.

Almost every week brings new examples of just how far the evil of these groups reaches.

We all witnessed the brutality and nihilism of the horrific attacks by Pakistani Taliban and Boko Haram on schoolchildren, the assassinations of *Charlie Hebdo* journalists, and numerous outrages and killings carried out by ISIL. The rise of ISIL was in part a consequence of, and illustrated the dangers of, atrocities committed by the government of **Syria** and failures of inclusive governance in **Iraq**.

Meanwhile, governments in **China, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, among others**, continued to stifle free and open media and the development of civil society through the imprisonment of journalists, bloggers, and non-violent critics. In **Thailand**, the military overthrew a democratically-elected government, repealed the constitution, and severely limited civil liberties; subsequent efforts by the military government to rewrite the country's constitution and recast its political intuitions raised concerns about lack of inclusivity in the process.

In the face of all this, the human aspiration for political liberty and honest, non-abusive governance remained strong.

Around the world, more people chose their leaders in competitive elections than ever before. On every continent, celebrations marked the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, while the same demands for human rights and accountable governance that gave rise to that historic day continue to spread.

In **Afghanistan**, millions of people defied threats of violence to choose a new President representing the country's first peaceful transfer of power from one elected government to another. **India's** parliamentary contest in April 2014 was one of the largest elections in history. **Indonesia's** young democracy saw a peaceful electoral transition to a leader who had challenged its traditional centers of power. **Tunisia** held its first free and fair presidential election since the 2011 revolution.

Activists in countries like **Russia** and **Venezuela** showed enduring strength and courage despite increasing restrictions, harassment, and incarceration in their peaceful pursuit of dignity and freedom.

As President Obama said to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2014, "all of us – big nations and small – must meet our responsibility to observe and enforce international norms. We are here because others realized that we gain more from cooperation than from conquest. We call upon others to join us on the right side of history – for while small gains can be won at the barrel of a gun, they will ultimately be turned back if enough voices support the freedom of nations and peoples to make their own decisions... [We] will not shy away from the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... We choose to work for the world as it should be."

As I travel the world in my capacity as Secretary of State, I regularly meet with brave individuals who risk their lives each and every day to advance human rights. They do so in spite of the threat of violence, and in the face of government attempts to silence their voices.

We at the Department of State will continue to press governments to uphold fundamental freedoms. We remain committed to advocating on behalf of civil society and speaking out for the protection of human rights for all individuals.

Now in their 39th year, these annual Congressionally-mandated reports provide a picture of how the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is being fulfilled. They help promote awareness regarding the reality of human rights in many of the dark corners of the world and the glimpses of light that brave and committed human rights defenders provide.

They are used by the Department of State and other government agencies needs to guide American foreign policy, and by Congress in its determination and allocation of foreign aid and security sector assistance. They also signal to the human rights defenders and activists under siege that the U.S. government recognizes their struggle and stands with civil society in its unending effort to preserve human rights.

I hereby transmit the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014* to the United States Congress.

John F. Kerry
Secretary of State